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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

THE NEEDLE IN ART.

BY ARACHNE.

EMBROIDERY is an art which consists of enriching a flat foundation, by working into it with a needle, colored flosses, gold or silver thread, and other extraneous materials, in floral, geometrical or figure designs. The origin of embroidery is lost in antiquity, but it is known to have existed before painting and to have been the first medium of reproducing natural objects in their natural colors.

The work came from the East, and was first called Phrygium or Phrygian work, while an embroiderer was called Phrygio, and designs worked entirely in gold or silver thread, Auriphrygium, and these words would seem to indicate that it was first brought to excellence by the Babylonians, although Sir J. G. Wilkinson has discovered upon Egyptian monuments painted in the eighteenth dynasty before the time of Babylon, designs in arabesque embroidery upon the garments and furniture of the Egyptians. We have undoubted evidence that both the Assyrians and the Egyptians were particularly lavish in the needlework decorations, of not only their temples, houses and garments, but even for the sails of their boats; and it was from them that the Jews learned the art, and considered it worthy of express mention in Exodus as part of the adornment of the Tabernacle and of the sacred robes of the priests.

From the Egyptians and the Hebrews, and also from Eastern nations, the Romans and Greeks became acquainted with its higher branches, and the latter appropriated its invention to their goddess, Minerva, while Homer introduced into his writings descriptions of the embroidery executed by Helen, Andromache and Penelope. The Romans, after their conquests, became possessed of much spoil in the way of embroidery, and the needlework of Babylon, which retained its reputation until the first century of the Christian era, was highly prized by them.

The veils given by Herod to the Temple came from Babylon, and Cicero describes the magnificence of the embroidered robes

of Babylonian work worn by Tarquin the elder. Gradually the Romans learned to embroider, and after the introduction of Christianity into Europe and the founding of religious houses, the art became of great importance, and almost a science, the designs being contributed by artists, and a lavish expenditure of time and money bestowed to bring the work to a high state of perfection. At one time only the borders of garments were worked, and as the name of Phrygium gradually died out, the Latin words, *Brustus*, *Brudatus*, *Aurobrus*, were substituted to denote needlework, and from these the French *Broiderie*, and the English Embroidery are derived.

From the first to the end of the sixteenth century, Italy was looked upon as the centre of embroidery work, the popes of Rome selecting from all countries the most beautiful specimens, and ordering that costly presents of needlework should be made by the faithful to the churches and religious houses.

As the knowledge of needlework increased, its varieties were no longer classed under one name, but were each distinguished by separate titles: Thus *Opus Consutum* meant two materials applied to each other, like our modern applique; and also cut work, *Opus Plumarium*, embroidery in satin, or long stitch, in which the stitches are laid over each other, like the plumage of a bird; *Opus Pulvianum*, or work upon canvas in cross, cushion or tent stitch, like our modern wool work; and *Opus Ancilum*, the name given to an English needlework that attained great celebrity both at home and abroad, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, from the peculiarity of a stitch used in

its construction. Up to the time of the Wars of the Roses, English embroidery was justly famous, but it then languished, and when the taste for it revived, it was never again executed with the same amount of gorgeous simplicity, the patterns becoming too overloaded with ornament for true taste.

On the Continent during this period the work flourished with increased vigor, and in Paris the embroiderers formed themselves into a guild, and were held in high esteem, grants of land being frequently given for their handiwork.

The Reformation may be said to have given the death blow to church work, and through it to some of the finer sorts of embroidery. Churches were no longer allowed to be decorated with altar cloths, priests' robes were almost abolished, and the convents (the great schools of art) were destroyed.

During the reigns of James I. and Charles I., not only crewel work but very fine embroidery was done upon silk and satin foundations, for secular purposes, but this never attained the dignity and costliness of the church work. The chief patterns were heraldic devices, portraits and flower pieces.

During the wars between Charles I. and his parliament, royalist ladies were fond of embroidering miniatures of the king and working into them the real hair of the monarch; mention is made in old chronicles of the granting of hair for that purpose. After the king's execution these miniatures, were in great demand, and were treasured in sacred relics, and many of them can still be seen in a good state of preservation.

A peculiar kind of raised embroidery, known as embroidery on the stamp, was much in vogue at this period, and for a century afterwards. During the reign of Queen Anne the patterns for embroidery were extremely good and well-considered, and the work, chiefly in flat satin stitch upon flat grounds, was essentially artistic both in design and coloring. This fine embroidery flourished during the reign of that queen and that of the Georges, the patterns becoming gradually more refined, and consisting of light garlands of flowers, or delicate sprays and groups of figures in the Watteau style, all shaded and worked in imitation of the most minute of paintings.

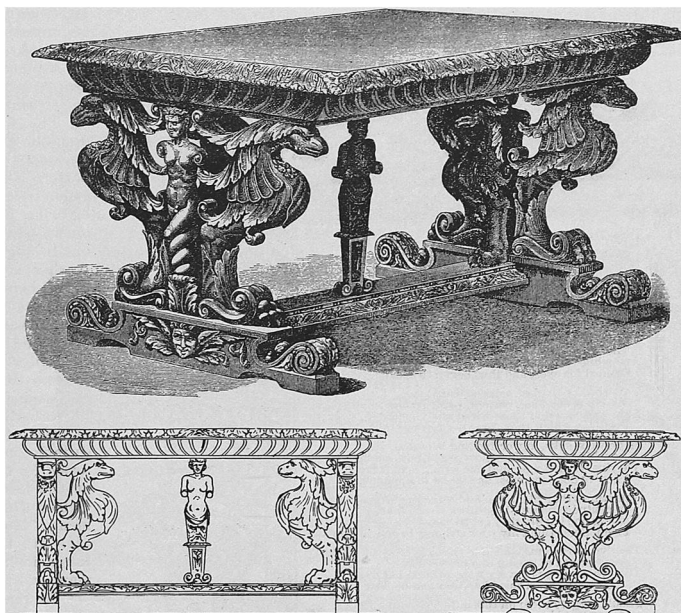
In the earlier part of the present century, fine embroidery was succeeded by a coarser kind, into which large

human figures were introduced, whose hands and faces were not worked but painted, while their dresses and surroundings were either worked in crewels or silks.

Etching embroidery or print work was then also much in fashion. To this period the works of Miss Linwood belonged, which are full-sized copies from Guido, Carlo Dolce, Opie and Gainsborough.

Embroidery then sank to its lowest ebb, church work had entirely disappeared, the fine silk work became out of date, and the only work that at all flourished was the mechanical copying of Berlin patterns, first in tent and finally in cross stitch; but the revival of the taste for design, fostered by the Exhibition of 1851, produced a favorable change in needlework, and from that date old work has been hunted up and copied, and artists have emulated each other in pointing out the difference between good and bad designing, in fresh patterns; and at present both church work and embroidery for home uses, are carried to as great a perfection as, if not actually surpassing, the needlework of the Middle Ages.

During all these changes in the history of European needlework, the art of embroidery in the East may be said to have remained in its original state. True to their Oriental character, the Eastern nations have continued steadily to produce the ancient patterns without inventing new ones, and as they possess in a high degree the most magnificent conception of coloring, they execute needlework of the most gorgeous tints, yet of such harmony, as to be in perfect taste. The Chinese, Persians,



LATE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE TABLE, IN POSSESSION OF THE GRAHE FAMILY OF DRESDEN.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

Indians and Japanese are all remarkable for their skill, and the modern Egyptians, Turks and Algerines are not far behind them, embroidering head veils and towels with gold and colored silks, and frequently enriching them with precious stones, and executing the whole with great taste; in fact, until the introduction into the East during the last few years of our meretricious aniline dyes, and the inharmonious coloring produced by them, Eastern needlework continued to be as beautiful as in the days of Moses.

Embroidery is divided into two chief heads: that worked upon white with washing materials, and that worked upon a colored foundation with colored materials. The latter of these is the original embroidery, and embraces most of the finest kinds of work, and it is again subdivided under three heads—gimped embroidery, embroidery on the stamp, and low or plain embroidery.

To become a good embroiderer it is necessary to take a few lessons of some good teacher. It is very certain that many persons lose much time in the acquirement of art work, through the want of proper instruction. Art embroideries, like paintings, are things the eye will never weary of, and our art work will go down from generation to generation and be cherished with pride and pleasure amounting almost to idolatry by the possessor. Many beautiful pieces of work done by our grandmothers are still possessed. To be the maker of a good piece of art needlework, let it be what it may, is truly a satisfaction. And to be

costliness of the material employed, as it does upon simplicity and harmony—two things too often disregarded—and a desire to express an idea or give scope to the imagination, which at once converts the most simple effort into the grandest individualization.

As a rule, a thing of beauty must be useful as well as ornamental. Anything intended for home decoration, which has grown out of a required need is far more beautiful than that which has beauty only to recommend it. So the fitness and appropriateness of an ornament is the striking point commanding the attention of the observer. Thus the principal features are more important than all the fancy articles of adornment, without which, however, the beauty of home would be incomplete. So long as the question of material and color only is to be considered, a taste for simplicity and harmony will be infallible guides.

In designing, some knowledge of the principles of elementary drawing and art principles, together with a good eye for geometrical proportions, are alone required to enable the beginner to design conventionally, for the use of the needle necessarily limits the subjects that can be treated.

Experience has proved that fruits, flowers and foliage cannot be represented in embroidery exactly as they are in nature. The artist in sculpture does not attempt to reproduce as minutely as the painter. So in art needlework. The designer must be content to attempt such reproductions as are suitable and possible for the material and process employed. It is the recognition of this principle of limitation which is meant by the term conventional. To conventionalize a plant or leaf simply means to use its forms and features in an arbitrary fashion.

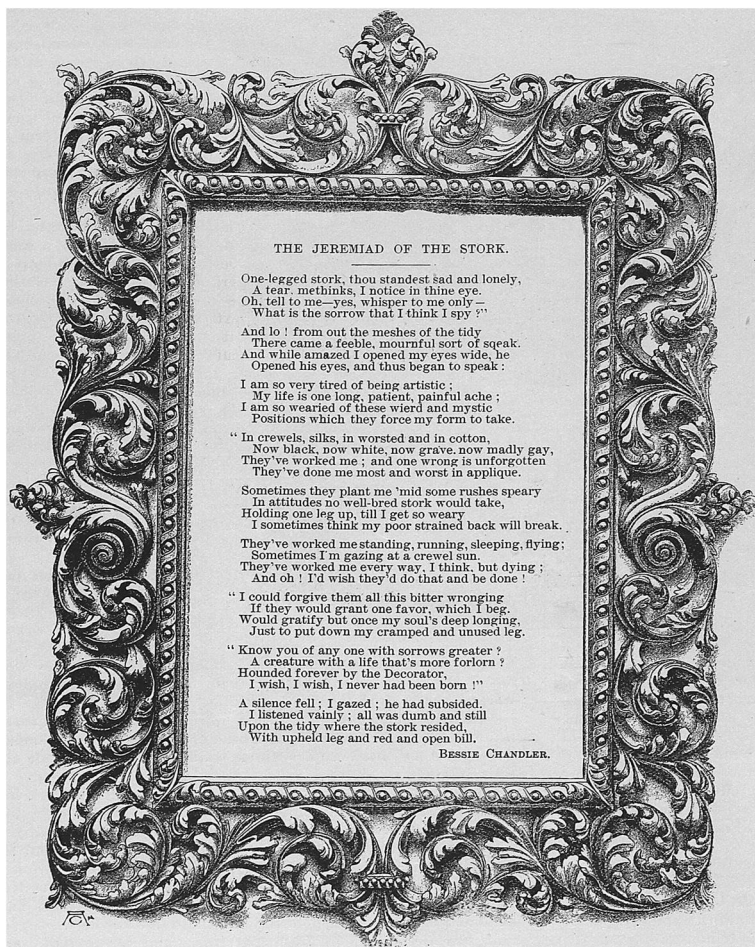
The first points to be decided upon in any design are the leading lines or stems which are to form the pattern. These are selected from the geometrical outline of the plants or leaf; for example (they may be variously treated), they may be branched out in angular severity, or in a more flowing style, the geometrical symmetry being preserved. It is at once clear that such adaptation admits of infinite variety. The branching alone being in accordance absolutely with the order of nature, flowing always in one direction, while the design radiating from it, or clothing it, may be varied according to the judgment or taste of the individual. The more suitable method of treating natural forms by the needle, for the beginner, or the less proficient worker, may be termed the natural method or treatment. Much knowledge and experience are needed in treating natural forms in a thoroughly conventional manner.

Flowers and foliage are favorite objects for reproduction in embroidery, and the most simple are the best to copy, because they can be more fully expressed in outline, and require the fewest shades of color.

PAINTING JAPAN WORK.—The colors to be painted are generally tempered in oil, with at least one-fourth of its weight of gum sandarach or mastic dissolved in it, and well diluted with turpentine, the turpentine allowing of the colors being laid on evenly and thinly. In some cases it is well to put on water colors or grounds of gold; if skilfully managed this will make the work appear as if embossed. These water colors are best prepared by means of isinglass size mixed with honey or sugar candy.

When laid on they must receive a number of coats of copal varnish.

CARVING.—Choice foreign carving on pianos and other articles of furniture is grounded out, that is to say sunk into the wood, so as not to interfere with real use, and is applied sparingly and with exquisite effect. This light sunk carved work has the advantage of preserving gold and coloring when used.



CARVED MIRROR FRAME, BAROQUE, EXECUTED BY VON MULLER, OF MUNICH.

able to adorn one's home and person with unquestionable taste is certainly an accomplishment worthy of possession. It improves the mind, and cultivates the abilities that might otherwise lie dormant unless stimulated by this influence. In promoting this art work, mental discipline and physical recreation conduces to a higher civilization, refinement of manners, grace and beauty, adorning the useful, and giving both pleasure and happiness.

The beauty of decoration lies not so much in the variety and